

# **The Archdiocese of Saint Boniface**

## **Pandemic Preparedness Guidelines for Churches and Workplaces**

### **Key facts**

The H1N1 flu virus is a new strain of pandemic influenza which is different than the seasonal flu. People have no natural immunity to protect against this virus. The H1N1 flu virus is affecting more young and healthy people than the regular seasonal flu, which normally affects seniors and young children. Most susceptible and at risk for severe illness are those born after 1957, particularly First Nations people, pregnant women, the obese and those with pre-existing conditions such as asthma, diabetes and heart disease.

The H1N1 flu virus is a respiratory illness that affects the nose, throat and lungs. The symptoms of an influenza are: sudden fever of 38C (100.4F) or higher, cough, AND one or more of the following – sore throat, muscle aches, or physical exhaustion. Children may also vomit or have diarrhea, but these symptoms are uncommon in adults. The elderly and those with lowered immunity may not develop a fever.

Influenza spreads easily from person to person by coughing or sneezing (within 1 to 2 metres), by hand to hand contact with an infected person, or by handling objects contaminated by infected people. The virus can survive on hard surfaces for up to 48 hours, on cloth, paper or tissue for up to 12 hours and on hands for about five minutes, long enough for you to inadvertently touch your mouth, nose or eyes and transfer the virus to your body.

People can spread the virus up to 24 hours before symptoms appear and up to seven days after symptoms have started. The time it takes between being infected and experiencing symptoms is between two and seven days. Not everyone who gets influenza develops symptoms but they may still spread it to others, especially if they cough or sneeze.

### **Prevention**

Wash hands often and thoroughly with warm, soapy water or use a hand sanitizer. Cough or sneeze into your arm, not your hand. Keep common surfaces and items clean and disinfected. Stay home if you are sick until you feel well enough to participate in all activities. Contact a health care professional if your symptoms worsen or you are pregnant or have underlying health problems.

### **Prevention in churches and in parish offices**

- Putting up prevention and information posters in prominent locations and giving verbal reminders of the need for cough etiquette and hand washing may be helpful to both staff and parishioners.
- Adequate supplies of hand washing soap and single use hand drying supplies or equipment e.g. hand sanitizers should be at entrances to churches, disposable towels in kitchens, bathrooms etc. Make sanitizing wipes and disinfectant spray available for telephones, water dispensers, cooler doors, etc.
- In the absence of water and soap, hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol may be used. A suitable substitute is a hand sanitizer containing benzalkonium chloride or benzethonium chloride.

- Consider making hand sanitizers available throughout the facility such as at church entrances, rest rooms and especially where food is prepared or eaten. Encourage parishioners to sanitize their hands when entering the church. Encourage staff to sanitize their hands frequently.
- Voluntary isolation - From the start of their illness until they are feeling better staff members, ministers and volunteers with flu-like illness should not attend work and should be sent home. They should not go into the community, except to seek medical care.
- Regular cleaning of the facility is recommended with special attention to horizontal surfaces (such as counter tops), doorknobs, faucet handles, pews and other surfaces frequently touched by the public. Custodial staff should be extra diligent in the cleaning and disinfection of bathroom facilities and high touch surfaces such as tabletops, faucets, door handles, computer keyboards, telephones, service counters, etc.

### **Business Continuity**

There may be need to make alternative arrangements because of staff absenteeism due to illness. Develop a continuity committee to determine critical functions and what needs to be done both internally and externally. Some considerations are:

- Leadership – consistent and calm messaging to parishioners and employees.
- Closure of the parish office - may need to cross train for back up, to check phone messages or work from home, flexible schedules due to illness or for caring for others who are ill.
- Financial – payroll, utilities and other financial commitments should be arranged in advance for up to two months by post dated cheques which are kept in an accessible location.
- If the parish does not provide sick leave - then consideration should be made to allow for continuance of salary so there is no undue hardship because of illness. Sick employees must not come to work.
- Money counters - should be provided with latex gloves and hand sanitizers.
- Home and hospital visits – pastoral visitors should be provided with hand sanitizers, latex gloves and masks to limit the spread of the virus to the ill or elderly.
- Support within zones – be ready to partner with other parishes to provide services if key people are affected by the flu.
- Other emergencies – be ready to handle other emergencies that may arise during a pandemic.

For more information about H1N1 please call the flu hotline at:

1-800-454-8302 or [www.fightflu.ca](http://www.fightflu.ca)